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FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2899
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001149

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/28/2019

TAGS: [IZ](#) [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#)

SUBJECT: KRG ELECTIONS ON TRACK, WITH LIMITED NEED FOR USG
SUPPORT

REF: A. BAGHDAD 642

[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 873

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Robert Ford for reasons 1.4
(d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Iraq's Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) reports that planning for the Kurdish parliamentary elections is on track, with an anticipated election date of July 25. IHEC's Chairman told us that PM Maliki has orally authorized funding for the elections, but that IHEC will not seek a formal announcement of a polling date until it receives written confirmation of the funds. He expected this to come soon. Once funding is secure, IHEC will plan the voter registry update for Kurdistan, certify political entities desiring to participate in the elections, and commence the necessary procurements. IHEC plans to invite international observers once the election date is set. Citing stable security conditions in the KRG, Haydari said IHEC does not plan to request security assistance from the USG. U.S.-based NGOs are helping with the Kurdish election, including a USAID-funded election administration expert and NDI and IRI who are conducting political party campaign training. End Summary.

Planning for KRG Elections On Track

[1](#)2. (C) In a meeting with Poloffs on April 26, IHEC Chairman Faraj Haydari confirmed that planning for the Kurdish parliamentary elections is on track. Visibly pleased, he reported resolution of a significant potential sticking point: whether the KRG or the Iraqi Government in Baghdad would fund the election administration costs. Haydari said Prime Minister Maliki had recently called him to confirm that the GOI would fund the elections (estimated cost is \$40 million), and on that basis IHEC could proceed with its preparations.

[1](#)3. (C) Haydari anticipates an election date of July 25, but will not seek a formal announcement of the date until it receives written confirmation of the funds. He expected to receive this soon. (Note: The KRG elections law, amended on March 25, requires Kurdish parliamentary elections to take place before August 4, at the discretion of KRG President Masoud Barzani. It will be Barzani who officially announces the election date. End note.) Chairman Haydari, along with UNAMI Elections Advisor Sandra Mitchell, indicated that the July election date would give IHEC, working in close coordination with the Kurdish Regional Electoral Office (KREO), sufficient time to prepare for Kurdish parliamentary elections.

[1](#)4. (U) According to UNAMI, IHEC needs to complete three critical steps before the elections can be held: updating the voter registry, certification of political entities participating in the election, and nomination of candidates and coalitions. In addition, timely procurements of elections materials -- including ballots -- will be built

into the operational plan. IHEC will continue to work closely with the International Electoral Assistance Team (IEAT, UNAMI plus the USAID-funded International Foundation for Electoral Systems) to prepare for the elections. An IEAT team based in Erbil is partnering with KREO staff to draft operational plans that will support election procedures for the 2.5 million registered voters in Kurdistan. In UNAMI's view, it will not be feasible for IHEC to support absentee voting for the Kurdish parliamentary elections.

¶5. (U) IHEC, working via the KREO in Erbil, has already initiated political entity registration in the Kurdish region. Registration will run from April 15-26. RRT Erbil reports that 42 entities have already registered, including Qreports that 42 entities have already registered, including KDP, PUK, and minority parties. Meanwhile, the DRL-funded programs operated by International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) are conducting campaign planning workshops for parties based in the Kurdish provinces. The International and Research Exchanges Board (IREX), also funded by DRL, is planning assistance designed to support Kurdish parliamentary elections, including journalism training, radio programming, and television programming.

International Observers

¶6. (C) Chairman Haydari told Poloffs that IHEC will send invitations for elections observers to organizations that field international election teams once the polling date is set. (Note: We expect IHEC will invite the same

BAGHDAD 00001149 002 OF 002

organizations it invited to observe the provincial elections in January; Haydari specifically mentioned the Arab League and the EU). Haydari noted that both KRG President Barzani and President Talibani have asked for international observers. RRT Erbil's political party contacts have also urged for international election observers.

Security

¶7. (C) Security for the elections, including for international observers, will be overseen by the newly created Kurdistan Security High Committee (KSHC). KSHC is a joint task force comprised of representatives from the KRG Ministry of the Interior, the heads of the local police in each of the KRG's three governorates, the Peshmerga, the General Secretary of Kurdistan, and the KREO. The committee will be the lead security entity for the election. Citing the relatively stable security in the KRG, Chairman Haydari said that IHEC does not plan to request USG security assistance for the Kurdish parliamentary elections. UNAMI is organizing training for the security managers at each of the three GEOs in the KRG which will include GPS training, first aid, and communications. At UNAMI's request, MNF-I is providing basic security training which will be a precursor to the nationwide GEO Security manager training slated for October.

Comment

¶8. (C) While the Kurdish parliamentary elections are on track, there is still criticism in the press over the KRG's decision to use closed lists. We share this disappointment and have communicated it to the KRG leadership. There are also widespread concerns that smaller political entities and potential voters not aligned with the KDP and PUK will be subjected to intimidation and harassment during the campaign season (septel). We don't see any technical hurdles at this

point that would overwhelm IHEC's ability to conduct successful elections. The critical operational concern is that the Kurdish parliamentary elections be completed in time to allow IHEC to turn its focus to administering national parliamentary elections in late 2009/early 2010. The sooner the Kurdish elections happen, the better. Embassy and RRT Erbil will work with UNAMI to encourage and organize the participation of international observers.

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